

FULL PROJECT REPORT

Project Title: *ANALYSING THE UNIQUE CURRICULUM OF AN ISLAMIC SCHOOL IN DUBAI: A QUALITATIVE STUDY*

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Abstract:

The study aims to analyse and explore the unique philosophy adopted by an Islamic School in Dubai called 'Islamic School for Training & Education (ISTE). The study will also look at the effects of the school's philosophy on its curriculum and instruction. In addition to studying written documents about the school and its curriculum, the researchers have collected qualitative data from teachers, students, parents and administrators to ascertain the feasibility of the project and gauge their reactions to this new and radical approach to education.

Key words:

Philosophy of education, Curriculum, Accelerated learning, Islamic school

Introduction:

Educational philosophy is regarded as the mirror, filter, and light for all components of curriculum. Determination of subject matter, pedagogy, and evaluation are largely dependent on the educational philosophy. A statement of philosophy is a screen in selecting goals and objectives of the school; it should be clearly stated and such clear statements can be utilized by examining every proposed objective. For Tyler, the curriculum designer should make sure that the philosophy of the school reflects society and able to reform the society in which the learner lives. Also, the school should make sure that it encourages young students to become good members of their societies and to be ready to change their societies' interest through

improvement and development. In addition, educational philosophy plays a vital role in determining what knowledge and values should be provided by the school so as to certify the needs of both society and students.

Among the criteria of determining aims and goals of education is to fulfill the need of the society. Thus students, teachers, parents, and administrators' perceptions are important to be considered as they are stakeholders. Many studies have been done in different places around the world related to educational philosophy and stakeholders; however the uniqueness of this school's philosophy and its curriculum make an interesting study worth undertaken. This present study was carried out on the school to explore the perceptions of stakeholders on the school educational philosophy and to highlight how the philosophy affects the curriculum.

Background:

The Islamic School of Training and Education (ISTE) was founded in Dubai in 1983 as a reaction to the educational crisis in the Muslim *Ummah*. This unique project was started by a wealthy entrepreneur philanthropist named Alhaj Saeed Lootah, who observed that the education system, not only in the United Arab Emirates but in the whole Muslim World was failing students with its long and arduous curriculum that is seemingly devoid of practical knowledge or benefit for students. The ideas of Lootah as the owner of the school were discussed by different people and they explained the reasons of Muslim world to fail in education. Some of the reasons are curriculum innovation and the lack of awareness in the Muslim societies. These weaknesses have led to the decrease in the production of Muslim scholars. Segal (1996) argued that the Muslim world produce a disproportionately small amount of scientific output, and much of it relatively low in quality. In numerical terms, forty-one predominantly Muslim countries with about twenty percent of the world's total population generate less than five percent of its scientists.

Words of the owner of the school go hand in hand with what was mentioned by Saqeb (2000) when he explains numbers of problems faced in the education of Muslims:

“In the 1950s and 1960s, the larger Muslim Ummah found their national education systems suffering from serious problems of backwardness, widespread ignorance and illiteracy in all Muslim countries. Most of the Muslim children were without basic primary education. Trained teachers, equipment and textbooks were by and large missing. Secondary schools were limited in their scope. Technical and vocational education was available only at the basic level. Tertiary and university education were inadequate and restricted to basic teaching without any research. Curricula for schools, colleges and universities were without clear goals and objectives. The quality of education at all levels was poor” (Saqeb, 2000).

Muslim educational reform has come to attention and been given much emphasis since 1977 through the World Conference on Muslim Education in Makka which called for the reform of education for all Muslim World. In this conference, Muslim scholars from around the globe have agreed on a definition for the aim of Islamic education as being, “... the creation of the good and righteous man who worships Allah in the true sense of the term, builds up the structure of his earthly life according to the *Sharia* and employs it to subserve his faith” (Siddique, 2012). The idea of establishment of the Islamic school and training by Lootah can be seen as the reflection to the World Muslim conference proposal on educational reform for all Muslim World. Thus, the philosophy behind its establishment is based on the principles in the Holy Quran and the Sunna, with the view of responding to the needs of the Muslim society in this challenging modern world.

Objectives:

The objective of the study is to explore the perception of stakeholders (the teachers, students, parents, administrators and alumna) on the philosophy of the school and its implementation. Second, this study seeks to reveal how the philosophy affects its curriculum in the school. Oliva (1997) argues that “unless we evaluate curriculum and its programs, we may be teaching effectively all the wrong things!” (p. 436). Obviously the school which teaches the wrong things will not achieve the required aims and goals of its curriculum. Moreover, if the curriculum is not evaluated, faults may be occurring for the learners and society in general.

Methodology:

This study employed the qualitative research methodology in the form of documentary analysis and qualitative data collection instruments, such as interview and observation at ISTE in Dubai. The sample for the study comprised of the main stakeholder of the school. The data collection procedure entailed twelve respondents forming a purposive and convenient sample chosen from the Islamic school for training and education stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with administrators, teachers, parents and students. The time spent for each interview for each respondent was about one hour. Interviews were conducted during the first week of the case study and took place at the school. Meanwhile documents relevant to the school philosophy were analyzed including books website documents and pictures. Also the researcher carried out eight observations to see how the implementation of the curriculum is carried out. The researcher employed descriptive framework analysis which analysed data from specific to the general as data analysis method. Data interpretation was based on the Stufflebeam's Context – Input – Process –Product Model. The concept map emerged in the text as it arranged into themes and sub-themes.

Findings:

As ISTE is a school that was established in an Islamic country, its educational philosophy is derived from the Holy Quran (An Nisaa' : 6). It is based on teaching knowledge, skills and experiences which will help graduates of the school to shoulder their duties in the society. Under this unique idea of the school, the school came out with various aims which comprise Islamic upbringing, teaching knowledge and skills with appropriate age, emphasis of Arabic and English languages and realization of time value whereby students end the duration of study within ten years. To attain these aims the school divides the time of study into three stages; i.e. basic, instructional and specialization. The school is also based on providing more practical skills compared to theory.

It is also found that time is the fundamental issue taken into consideration in ISTE, minimizing years of study from seventeen of the traditional system to ten years. Within this

short period, the school teaches two curricula and provide graduates with the knowledge and skills that help them in their life.

The role of the teacher in the implementation of curricula is that of *murabbi*, teachers are taking care of the children as parents do at home. It also observed that teachers in the class are the guide, helper and not the knower. Furthermore, teaching and learning activities are based on learner-centred approach.

Moreover, the school has met the aims of education; graduates are able to shoulder their responsibilities. Graduates and students are fluent speakers of standard Arabic and English, students' behaviours are good and are aware of Islamic values. Additionally there is an increasing number of enrolments and establishment of other branches in other countries.

Despite the fact that the school has great successes, it still faces some obstacles. To convince people to accept the idea is among the challenges. The school faces some challenges that hinder quick improvements; as it becomes difficult for people to understand the idea because they believe in the traditional system. Students registered in mid-level have problems of discipline while internet generation plays a big role as the source of challenges in this school. However, the management takes the alternative ways to overcome the mentioned barriers.

Conclusion:

The school educational philosophy is based on Islamic perspectives which follow the Quran and Sunna. Hence, Islamic scholars suggest the introduction of revealed and acquired kinds of knowledge; the school curriculum is integrated to satisfy the needs of the learners and society as well. To reach the aims of education, teachers employ a learner-centred approach, however teacher-centred is not ignored at all, it is used where necessary. Teachers are regarded as ideal persons where students learn from them, so that they are responsible to take care of students all time during school hours. To put emphasis on this, the school believes on the idea of one teacher one class, so the teacher is also responsible to teach all subjects in his/her class. However, the management starts to employ language specialized teachers to teach English as a second language. On another aspect, the management facilitates working

conditions to enhance learning. Formative and summative evaluations are applied to see whether the aims, goals and objectives are being achieved.

The school starts to bear fruits; almost all graduates are working in the companies of the owner of the school and in other institutions, holding different positions. Also, they continue with private studies while they are working and now some of them are diploma and degree holders. Not only that, the school enrolment is increasing every year and students who join the school come from different parts of the world.

Future plan of the research:

The researchers plan to present the findings of this study in conferences as well as publish a journal article regarding the subject matter.

References:

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